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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE

Letter dated 24 June 1998 from the Permanent Observer for Palestine to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the High Commissioner for Human Rights

On Sunday 21 June 1998, the Israeli Government decided to adopt the plan proposed by its Prime Minister, Mr. Netanyahu, to expand the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem to the occupied West Bank. By expanding the area of the city, the Israeli Government would be able to increase the number of its Jewish population there by 30,000 new settlers.

This Israeli decision has drawn heightened international criticism and condemnation since it infringes heavily upon numerous General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, and flagrantly violates article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the principles of international law and the accords signed between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Israeli Government in the framework of the peace process, to which neither Mr. Netanyahu nor his Government grant any respect; on the contrary, he is doing his best to demolish it by his daily practices on the ground.

The international condemnation of this plan has been illustrated by the various positions expressed by numerous States, and also by the attitude of the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, who, in his statement issued on 22 June 1998, deplored the Israeli practices aimed at strengthening the Israeli hold on occupied East Jerusalem, and their going ahead with their programme of Judaizing Jerusalem, after they had annexed it to Israel in a prior flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and international public law.

It is clear that the policy of the Israeli Government in this field is based, in addition to the establishment and expansion of settlements in the occupied territories, on the systematic demolishing of Palestinian homes in the city of Jerusalem, Hebron, and in all the suburbs of the West Bank. For example, the Israeli occupation authorities demolished yesterday five Palestinian homes in the region of Hebron. They had demolished a week before a home in the village of Alwalja near Jerusalem, and eight other homes and five other structures in the villages of Takkua, Oum Soufa and Arab Alrachidia in the municipality of Bethlehem, bringing the number of homes demolished by the Israeli occupation authorities in the municipality of Bethlehem alone during the past three years to 100.

Mr. Ezer Weisman, President of the State of Israel, also expressed his attitude towards his Government's decision in this respect saying that Mr. Netanyahu has switched off the light of peace in the region.

The Israeli Government persists in its grave violations of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. It still refuses to accept the de jure applicability and even the application of the Convention to the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, thus rejecting the will of the international community represented by the United Nations Security Council, the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights whose reiterated resolutions have affirmed continuously for 30 years, and at each of their sessions, the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, and which have called on the Government of Israel to abide by its international commitments and to apply the Convention in the occupied Palestinian territories. Despite all this, the Israeli Government persists in flagrantly violating the principles of international humanitarian law and international public law, particularly articles 49 and 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

I would be grateful to you if you could have this letter distributed as an official document of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights, under agenda item 8.

(Signed:) Nabil RAMLAWI
Ambassador
Permanent Observer for Palestine